

Illinois Early Learning Council
Joint Workforce Development/Cultural & Linguistic Diversity Work Group
Recommendations – Approved October 26, 2009

The joint Workforce Diversity work group, whose members are from the Workforce Development and Cultural & Linguistic Diversity Committees as well as at-large members who represent higher education faculty, governmental organizations, advocacy groups, training organizations and bilingual practitioners, has been meeting since September 2008. The group developed cross-sector recommendations based on the recognition that all early childhood staff need the knowledge and practice skills to ensure optimal educational and development outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse young children. Outlined below are strategies for expanding preparation programs to specifically include pedagogy and practical experiences for working with very young English Language Learners.

On January 1, 2009 a statutory change to 105 ILCS 5/14C-2 (d) went into effect which includes Pre-K students in the definition of children with limited English-speaking ability. In an effort to define how screening and subsequent language support services will be made available to these newly eligible preschool children, rule changes are being proposed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) which include offering transitional bilingual instruction to preschoolers and requiring Type 04 certified staff teaching in those classrooms to hold a Bilingual/ESL Approval. Preliminary research by Erikson Institute on coursework that addresses the developmental and educational needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children at 2-and-4-year institutions indicates a significant shortage in Illinois of Bilingual/ESL coursework that includes pedagogy related to very young children. The scarcity of developmentally appropriate courses for working with young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds impacts both the availability of diversity-proficient higher education faculty members and subsequent preparation of teachers across early childhood programs in the state.

Timeline:

In considering an implementation timeline for these recommendations the work group supports the ISBE proposed rule change requiring Type 04 certified staff teaching in bilingual classrooms to hold a Bilingual/ESL by 2014. The work group also recognizes that each higher education institution will need to engage in an internal process of course development and approval as well as cultivate a pool of qualified faculty. However, in order to meet the needs of current and incoming preschoolers and help practitioners come into compliance with proposed ISBE rule changes, it is imperative that higher education institutions begin that process now. The joint work group estimates that early childhood coursework which incorporates knowledge and skills for meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children and Bilingual/ESL teacher preparation programs with early childhood content should be available within two years.

Workforce Diversity Recommendations

- 1. Higher education institutions offering a Bilingual/ESL Approval must modify course content to include pedagogical and research-based practices as well as skills and techniques relevant to teaching English Language Learners (ELL) from birth-to-eight. Coursework regarding language development, methodology, culture and ELL assessment should be offered with relevance to age and developmental groupings, such as early childhood, elementary and secondary levels.**

Rationale: Many Bilingual/ESL Approval programs currently focus predominantly on K-12 content. Assessment and methodology techniques vary based on the age and developmental level of a child. New ISBE draft rules will require that some *teachers of children ages 3 to 5 who are assigned to a transitional bilingual program or a transitional program of instruction that is administered by a school district serving 20 or more students from the same language background* hold a Bilingual/ESL Approval by 2014. This will require Bilingual/ESL Approval programs to add content relevant to young ELLs.

- 2. Higher education institutions offering a Bilingual/ESL Approval program must make coursework towards earning the certificate available to students at the Baccalaureate level.**

Rationale: Many Bilingual/ESL Approval programs are currently offered at the Masters Degree level. To meet the needs of a growing English as a second language birth-to-eight year old population in IL and come into compliance with draft ISBE rule changes requiring some Type 04 certificated teachers to also earn a Bilingual/ESL Approval, coursework needs to be available at the Bachelors level.

- 3. Higher education institutions offering Associate Degrees and certificates in early childhood and child development must offer specific course content and practice experiences in a variety of settings relevant to the education of English language learners from birth-to-eight.**

Rationale: The majority of early childhood staff in Illinois are educated in community colleges yet these programs do not currently offer sufficient coursework to help students gain the necessary knowledge and practice skills to ensure optimal educational and development outcomes for young English language learners. To meet the needs of children from birth-to-eight who are not English proficient, English language learner coursework relevant to early childhood must be available at the Associate level.

- 4. Higher education institutions in partnership with school districts and service providers will develop cohorts targeting interested Type 29 Transitional Bilingual Certificate holders as well as individuals with bilingual language**

skills and baccalaureate degrees from the United States or other countries to promote advancement of their early childhood careers.

Rationale: There is a pool of potential early childhood teachers who have bilingual skills and some early childhood pedagogy or experience. Candidates to be targeted for Type 04 cohorts include staff with baccalaureate degrees, those with early childhood experience or coursework from their home countries, bilingual skills, and interest in an early childhood career. Teachers who hold a Type 29 Transitional Bilingual Certificate are currently eligible to teach in K-12 settings while working toward a teaching certificate but they are not endorsed by ISBE to teach in a Pre K setting. Participation in a Type 04 preparation program will give Type 29 holders diverse field experiences in early childhood settings.

- 5. School districts and service providers should encourage bilingual staff members that hold a Type 04 Certificate or a degree from an institution of higher learning in a foreign country which the Certification Board determines to be the equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree from a recognized institution of higher learning in the United States to take a Language Proficiency Examination in either the non-English language in which transitional bilingual instruction is offered for which certification is sought or in English.**

Rationale: There is a pool of potential bilingual early childhood teachers who have a Type 04 Certificate or the equivalent and bilingual skills but have not fulfilled the requirements of earning a Bilingual/ESL Approval which includes passing a Language Proficiency Test and completing an 18 credit Bilingual/ESL program which includes 100 clinical hours of training.

- 6. All coursework in early childhood teacher preparation programs at the Associate, Baccalaureate and Masters Degree levels must include in-depth current knowledge, techniques, and methods for teaching and assessing young children from diverse cultural, ability and linguistic backgrounds.**

Rationale: The responsibility for educating children of varying abilities from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds lies not only with teachers who hold Bilingual/ESL or Special Education certificates but with all teachers who have or may have students with varying skills who are English language learners in their programs. Many practitioners in IL hold an early childhood Associate or Baccalaureate degree but did not gain sufficient knowledge or skills from their teacher preparation programs to be prepared for working with children from diverse cultural, linguistic and ability backgrounds.

- 7. Clinical requirements in early childhood teacher preparation programs, at all degree levels, must be fulfilled in diverse settings with children from racial, cultural, linguistic and ability diverse backgrounds.**

Rationale: Teacher candidates who are exposed to knowledge and skills for working with children from diverse culture, ability and language backgrounds in a variety of settings receive support in putting pedagogy into practice from their adult learning environment and are then better prepared to work successfully with all children upon entry into the field.

- 8. System frameworks such as the Quality Rating System, Great START, Gateways to Opportunity Scholarships and the Early Childhood Block Grant RFP budgets should incorporate graduated, incremental salary increases and scholarship incentives for early childhood classroom staff who have demonstrated competencies, at each degree level, that reflect knowledge and skills that pertain to working with children and families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.**

Rationale: Proficiency in a language other than English is a marketable skill when working with children who are English Language Learners and should be compensated accordingly. Increased and competitive compensation can be an incentive for staff to pursue a Bilingual/ESL Approval.

- 9. Designate funding for developing a web-based system of resources and supports available to teachers, program administrators and higher education faculty that will provide research-based information on current knowledge and best practices related to educating young English language learners.**

Rationale: Currently there is a scarce supply of practicing early childhood professionals and/or higher education early childhood faculty who possess knowledge and skills to ensure providing optimal educational and development outcomes for young English language learners. Practitioners, administrators and higher education faculty would benefit from a centralized information source to obtain best practice information and current research on language development, teaching techniques and methods, assessment and screening tools as well as supervision supports for those working with linguistically, culturally and ability diverse young children and their families.